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Livestock Waste Management and Conservation

Procedures for Manure and Litter Sampling (Class I & II – Large and Medium CAFOs)

Tennessee CAFO Factsheet #14

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Nutrient composition of manure varies with a number of factors, including animal type, bedding, ration, storage and handling, environmental conditions, field application method, age of manure, timing of sampling and sampling technique. This variability makes book values (or averages) an unreliable source for determining application rates of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. Each livestock production operation and manure management system is unique, and an individual farm's manure analysis can vary from average values by 50 percent or more. Testing manure may better indicate how animal management and other factors actually affect nutrient contents and will allow for more accurate calculation of application rates.

The results of a manure analysis are only as reliable as the sample taken. A representative sample is needed to accurately reflect the nutrient content. However, obtaining a representative sample can be a challenge as manure nutrient content is not uniform within storage structures. Mixing and sampling strategies can insure that samples more accurately reflect the type of manure that will be applied.

When to Sample

The ideal time to sample manure is prior to application to ensure that results of the analysis are received in time to adjust nutrient application rates.

However, do not allow long periods of time to pass before application begins, because there can be storage and handling losses over time. Sampling several days to a week prior to application is best. However, a complication of the timing of the sampling is that semi-solid (or slurry) manure should be well agitated before sampling, and in many situations, such as contracting waste application to a third party, agitators or other necessary equipment are not available until application begins. In cases such as this, "pre-sampling" (dipping samples off the top of the storage structure for N and K concentrations) can be used to estimate application rates (See page 4 for more info on pre-sampling).

Building a "bank" of manure analysis over time can be quite useful in the future as long as animal management practices, feed rations or manure storage and handling methods do not drastically change from present methods. If samples do not vary greatly from year to year or are consistent during spring or fall applications, the "bank" averages will help estimate application rates if an analysis cannot be performed prior to application.

Safety Precautions

It is more dangerous and more difficult to sample from liquid storage facilities than dry-manure systems. Proper precautions should be taken to prevent

accidents, such as falling into the storage facility or being overcome by manure gases.

1. Have two people present at all times;
2. Never enter confined manure-storage spaces without appropriate safety gear, such as a self-contained breathing apparatus;
3. When agitating a storage pit below a building, be sure to provide adequate ventilation for both humans and animals; and
4. When agitating outdoor pits, monitor activities closely to prevent erosion of berms or destruction of pit liners.

Sample Preparations

1. Check with the laboratory performing the analysis, as most of these labs have plastic bottles available for liquid sample collection or sealable plastic bags for dry samples (freezer bags work well). Additionally, they may have specific sample collection procedures, including holding times, refrigeration and shipping requirements.
2. Do not use glass containers, as expansion of the gases in the sample can cause the container to break.
3. Never use galvanized containers for collection or mixing due to the risk of contamination from metals like zinc in the container.
4. When taking liquid samples from facilities spreading both effluent and solids, the manure should be agitated for two to four hours before taking the sample.
5. Liquid samples can be taken during agitation (after two to four hours have passed) because most agitation equipment is effective 75 to 100 feet away from the equipment.

6. Take multiple samples from the storage facility and mix them together thoroughly in a larger bucket to obtain a representative sample. For liquid or semi-solid samples, use a stirring rod to get the solids spinning in suspension and collect the representative sample while the liquid is still spinning.
7. When taking liquid samples, fill the plastic bottle three-fourths full and leave at least 1 inch of air space to allow for gas expansion.
8. When taking dry samples, squeeze all of the excess air from the sealable plastic bag to allow for gas expansion and place the first bag into a second sealable plastic bag to prevent leaks.
9. Label the plastic bags or bottles prior to sampling with your name, date and sample identification number. Use a waterproof pen.
10. After sampling, place the container(s) in the refrigerator or freezer (preferred) until mailed to the lab. Cooling the samples will reduce microbial activity, chemical reactions and reduce odors.
11. Ship samples early in the week (Monday–Wednesday) using an overnight service. Avoid holidays and weekends.

Sampling Semi-Solid and Liquid Manure from Storage Facilities

Manure with 10 to 20 percent solids is classified as semi-solid manure and can usually be handled as a liquid. Semi-solid manure usually requires the use of chopper pumps to provide thorough agitation before pumping. Liquid manure is manure with less than 10 percent solids and is handled with pumps, pipes, tank wagons or irrigation equipment (if less than 5 percent solids).

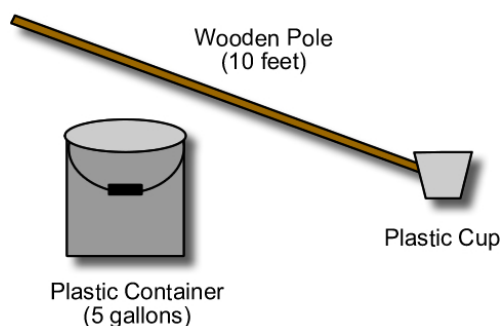
If all contents of the entire semi-solid or liquid storage facility will be applied, complete agitation (2-4 hours minimum) is required to accurately sample the manure because in liquid and semi-solid systems, settled solids can contain more than 90 percent of the phosphorus. However, if solids will be purposefully left on the bottom when the storage structure is pumped out, as is sometimes the case with lagoons, then complete agitation during sampling will generate artificially high nutrient values. In this case, agitation of the solids or sludge at the bottom of the lagoon is not needed for nutrient analysis, and premixing the surface liquid in the lagoon is not needed.

Methods of Sampling:

Several different methods may be used to sample liquid or semi-solid manure from storage facilities:

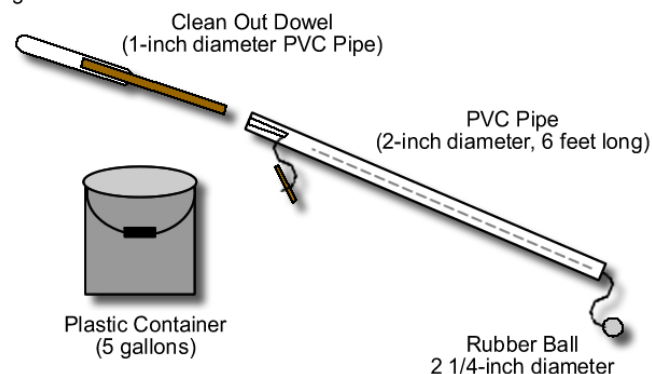
1. Use a plastic sampling cup with a 10- to 12-foot handle to obtain surface water samples (see Figure 1). Collect about a pint of sample from several locations (six to eight) around the perimeter of the storage unit about 6 feet from the bank and 12 inches below the surface. Avoid floating debris or scum. Pour each of the samples into a clean plastic bucket and mix well. Pour representative sample in plastic container for shipping. (*Chastain, 2003*)

Figure 1.



2. Throw a small plastic bucket tied to a long rope out towards the middle of the storage unit while holding onto the rope. Begin pulling the bucket back to the bank as soon as it strikes the surface. Make sure the bucket is raised above the surface before it strikes the bank. Pour each sample into a larger plastic bucket, and repeat this procedure at four to six locations evenly spaced around the perimeter of the storage unit. Mix all samples well and pour representative sample into a plastic container for shipping. (*Chastain, 2003*)
3. Samples may also be taken using a probe or a tube. They can be constructed out of a 1½-inch diameter PVC pipe. Cut the PVC pipe a foot longer than the depth of the pit. Run a ¼-inch rod or string through the length of the pipe and attach a plug such as a rubber stopper or rubber ball (see Figure 2). The rod or the string must be longer than the pipe. If using a rod, bend the top over to prevent it from falling out of the pipe. The probe should be slowly inserted into the pit or lagoon with the stopper open, to the full depth of the pit. Pull the string or rod to close the bottom of the pipe and pull the probe out of the pit, being careful not to tip the pipe and dump the sample. Release the sample into a large plastic bucket and repeat the process at least three times around the pit. Mix all samples well and pour a representative sample into a plastic container for shipping. (*Rieck-Hinz, 2003*)

Figure 2.



Sampling Semi-Solid and Liquid Manure during Land Application with Tank Wagons

Settling begins as soon as agitation stops, so samples should be collected as soon as possible after the manure tank wagon is filled, unless the tanker has an agitator. Be sure the port or opening does not have a solids accumulation from prior loads. Collect samples in a plastic bucket from the loading or unloading port or the opening near the bottom of the tank. Stir the sample in the bucket to get the solids in suspension. Remove a ladle full while the liquid is still spinning and pour into the sample bottle. Repeat these steps until the sample bottle is three quarters full.

Sampling Liquid Manure during Land Application with Irrigation Systems

Place plastic buckets randomly at different distances from the sprinkler head in the field to collect the liquid manure that is being applied by an irrigation system. Immediately after manure has been applied, collect manure from the buckets and combine them into one container. Stir the collective sample, remove a ladle full while the liquid is still spinning and pour into the sample bottle.

Pre-Sampling Nitrogen and Potassium from Liquid Manure Systems

If liquid systems cannot be agitated prior to application and a sample is needed to estimate application rates, manure samples can be dipped off the top of the stored liquid manure to analyze for N and K concentrations. Research indicates that the top-dipped liquid represents approximately 90 percent of the N concentration measured in mixed, field-collected samples. Multiply the results of the N concentration from top-dipped samples by 1.1 for a better estimate of N. Dipping a sample from

the surface of a liquid storage pit does NOT provide a good estimate of P concentrations in the pit, so use of the P analysis from top-dipped samples is not recommended. Therefore, if application is limited to a P-based application rate, pre-sampling is not recommended. Producers who take these types of samples should remember to take additional samples during application to calculate the actual amount of nutrients applied and use to adjust commercial fertilizer application. (*Rieck-Hinz, 2003*)

Sampling Dry or Solid Manure

Solid manure systems will include fecal matter, urine, bedding and feed. They can vary from one location to another within the same production operation and from season to season. Sampling of dry or solid manure is best done in the field during application, because it will take into account losses that occur during handling and application. Manure is better mixed during application than during storage. Results will not be available in time to adjust application rates; however, sampling will allow producers to adjust any future commercial fertilizer rates and manure application in subsequent years. If a sample must be taken prior to application to estimate application rates, be sure to take samples from various places in the manure pile, stack or litter to obtain a representative sample for analysis. It may even be beneficial to take samples several times during the year because of the variation in bedding content.

Methods of Sampling:

As with liquid or semi-solid systems, many different methods can be used to obtain a representative sample. The method chosen will depend on the type of solid system used on the farm. Sub-samples can be taken with a shovel, pitchfork or soil probe. Regardless of the method of sampling, a composite

sample will need to be taken from all of the samples to ensure it represents the entire manure used for application. To obtain a composite sample, place all sub-samples (the more sub-samples, the more accurate the results) in a pile and mix with a shovel by continuously scooping from the outside of the pile to the center of the pile until well mixed. Fill a one-gallon plastic Zip-lock® freezer bag (or the bag provided by the laboratory) one-half full with the composite sample by turning the bag inside out over one hand. With the covered hand, grab representative handfuls of manure and turn the freezer bag right side out over the sample with the free hand. Squeeze out the excess air, close, seal and store sample in another plastic sealable bag in the freezer until mailed. (Rieck-Hinz, 2003)

1. *Sampling poultry litter in-house:* Collect 10 to 15 sub-samples from throughout the house to the depth the litter will be removed. Cake litter samples should be taken at the depth of cake removal. The number of samples taken near feeders or waterers should be proportionate to their space occupied in the whole house. (LPES)
2. *Sampling stockpiled manure, litter or compost:* Ideally, stockpiled material should be stored under cover on an impervious surface. The exterior of uncovered waste may not accurately represent the majority of the material because rainfall moves water-soluble nutrients down into the pile. If an uncovered stockpile is used over an extended period of time, it should be sampled before each application. Take 10 sub-samples from different locations around the pile at least 18 inches below the surface. (LPES)

3. *Sampling from a bedded pack:* It is recommended that samples from a bedded pack be taken during loading. Take at least five sub-samples while loading several spreader loads. (Peters, 2003)
4. *Sampling daily hauls:* Place a five-gallon pail under the barn cleaner 4 to 5 times while loading a spreader. (Peters, 2003)
5. *Sampling scrape-and-haul feedlots:* Facilities where manure accumulates on paved feedlots and is scraped and hauled to the field daily or several times during the week are referred to as scrape-and-haul feedlots. Sub-samples can be collected by scraping a shovel across approximately 25 feet of the paved feedlot. This process should be repeated 10 or more times, taking care to sample in a direction that slices through the variations of moisture, bedding, depth, age, etc. Avoid excessively wet areas and areas with large amounts of hay or feed. Several composite samples may be needed for this type of facility. (Rieck-Hinz, 2003)
6. *Sampling during spreading or land application:* Spread a sheet of plastic or a tarp in the field and drive the tractor and spreader over the top of the plastic to catch the manure from one pass of the spreader. Samples should be collected to represent the first, middle and last part of the storage facility or loads applied and should be correlated as to which loads are applied on each field to track changes in nutrient content throughout the storage facility. (Rieck-Hinz, 2003)

References

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Livestock and Poultry Environmental Stewardship (LPES) Curriculum. Manure Sampling. Module D, Land Application and Nutrient Management.